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Stay Humble and Fly High: The Roles of Subordinate Voice and Competitive Work Context in the Linkage between Leader Humility and Career Success

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Stay Humble and Fly High: The Roles of Subordinate Voice and Competitive Work Context in the Linkage between Leader Humility and Career Success

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between leaders' humility and their career success. We propose that humble leaders are more likely to occupy central positions in their subordinate teams' voice networks where they improve their own performance and gain favorable reward recommendations. We also argue that in seemingly disadvantageous competitive work contexts, humble leaders become more central in the team voice network and increase their career prospects. We found support for these hypotheses in a multisource field study of 116 supervisors, 461 subordinates, and 34 shop managers from a Chinese company and in a vignette-based experiment with 233 working adults. Theoretical and practical implications for career success, leader humility, and voice literature are discussed.

Keywords: career success, leader humility, social network, voice, competitive work context

Stay Humble and Fly High: The Roles of Subordinate Voice and Competitive Work Context in the Linkage between Leader Humility and Career Success

Scholars and practitioners increasingly recognize the benefits of a unique leader characteristic, humility, which is grounded in a transcendent self-concept and manifested as an accurate view of oneself, an appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and an openness to feedback (Ou et al., 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2012). Indeed, humble leaders have been found to effectively develop subordinates, increase team performance, and cultivate an empowering organizational culture for organizational functioning (Chiu, Balkundi, Owens, & Tesluk, 2020; Hu, Erdogan, Jiang, Bauer, & Liu, 2018; Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018; Rego et al., 2019).

However, the literature is ambivalent about humble leaders' career prospects. Some researchers suggest that humility brings self-awareness for making suitable career choices (Dik, Morse, White, & Shimizu, 2017) and some find that humble employees are rated as promotable (Li, Zhang, Zhu, & Li, 2020). Yet, others imply that humble leaders may fail to reach the top (Ou et al., 2018; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Qin, Chen, Yam, Huang, & Ju, 2020; Pfeffer, 2015). Expressing humility can be emotionally exhausting (Yang, Zhou, Wang, Lin, & Luo, 2019) and may be perceived as lacking agency (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019). More importantly, when humble leaders avoid promoting themselves or taking credit from others, they may fail to gain their superiors' recognition and rewards, particularly when peers compete aggressively in the career arena (Pfeffer, 2015). Nevertheless, humble leaders do sometimes attain top leadership positions (Collins, 2001; Ridge & Ingram, 2017). Therefore, our study examines how and when humble leaders achieve career success. The answers to these questions are theoretically important, as we focus on the effect of leader humility on career success, an actor-centered outcome that is crucial and meaningful to the leaders themselves. Thus, we expand the

nomological understanding of humility beyond its effects on subordinates, teams, and organizations (Wallace, Ou, & Owens, 2017). As we identify pathways and barriers to humble leaders' career success, we can help managers more effectively promote humility training. Importantly, as we discover whether and how humble leaders may be disadvantaged in promotion considerations, we can suggest ways to remove these barriers, which can help organizations benefit from having more humble leaders.

To answer the call for a social network understanding about leadership (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006), our study focuses on leaders' ties with subordinates as an essential link between leader humility and leaders' own career success. Social network researchers have long acknowledged that connections with peers or superiors promote career success (Fang et al., 2015; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001), but we examine the overlooked benefits of leaders' ties with subordinates, or more specifically, their central positions in subordinates' networks. We consider these ties as a type of downward social capital that enhances the leaders' influence and performance (Venkataramani, Richter, & Clarke, 2014) because leaders inevitably rely on subordinates to coproduce leadership (Shamir, 2007) and cannot succeed without their support (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

In this study, we focus on leaders' in-degree centrality in the voice network of subordinates; that is, we are interested in the extent to which leaders occupy the central position of subordinates' voice expression. Broadly speaking, voice is the informal and discretionary expression of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information, or opinions about work-related issues. More specifically, we focus on the constructive voice intended to generate team or organizational improvement or change (Morrison, 2014). Researchers show that employees do not direct their voices solely upward to leaders, but also horizontally among peers; however, upward voice can

more effectively promote team or organizational functioning (Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013; Li, Liao, Tangirala, & Firth, 2017). We chose leaders' in-degree centrality in their subordinates' voice network as our focus because research indicates it is superior to other forms of centrality, such as closeness or betweenness, in predicting job performance and career success (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Fang et al., 2015).

We expect that leaders' centrality in subordinates' voice networks can be a particularly resilient resource for humble leaders in competitive work contexts that encourage employees to compete with each another for rewards (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008). Although some researchers suggest that such contexts may disfavor humble leaders (Ou et al., 2018), we argue that the particular downward social capital path may be stronger in these situations. Competitive contexts provide competing information about whether voice will be rewarded, but humble leaders provide clear signals that encourage voice, making them more resilient on their pathway to career success. As intensive interorganizational competition also likely intensify intraorganizational competition and increase employee psychological pressure (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986; Birkinshaw & Lingblad, 2005), humble leaders may help employees to thrive in such contexts.

In sum, we propose that leader humility relates positively to leaders' in-degree centrality in a team voice network, which relates positively to leader performance and in turn career success, as indicated by managers' reward recommendations (Allen & Rush, 1998). We also propose that this relationship is stronger in competitive work contexts. We tested this research model (Figure 1) with a field study of 114 Chinese leaders and an experiment involving 233 working adults.

Insert Figure 1 about Here

Our study contributes to several lines of research. First, we advance research on leader humility as we illustrate how humble leaders derive personal benefits in the form of recommendations for career advancement. Thus, we show the much-needed actor-centered consequences (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019) of humility and offer rationales for why humble leaders can be effective even in seemingly disadvantageous, competitive contexts. In so doing, our study is among the first to identify empirically the mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions of career success among subordinate-centered leaders, or those who care about their subordinates' needs (Panaccio, Donia, Saint-Michel, & Liden, 2015). Second, we contribute to research on career success by diverging from the usual emphasis on higher status ties (Podolny & Baron, 1997; Seibert et al., 2001) to suggest that leaders' lower status ties, such as with subordinates, provide career advantages. Third, we extend the research on the effects of voice on voice initiators, teams, and organizations (Chamberlin, Newton, & Lepine, 2017; Detert et al., 2013) as we observe how voice affects personal outcomes for leaders who are voice recipients and facilitators (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). Lastly, we shed lights on whether humble leaders can achieve career success in a unique context of China. Although humility is a deep-rooted virtue in China, nonhumble or paternalistic leaders are also prevalent due to its cultural values of vertical collectivism and power distance (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). In addition, as Chinese markets are becoming increasingly competitive and leader-subordinate relationships increasingly complex, leader humility sometimes becomes a double-edged sword (Qin et al., 2020). Therefore, examining whether humility benefits leaders' career can further enhance our understanding of how humility functions in China.

Theory and Hypotheses

Leader Humility, Ties with Subordinates, and Career Success

Leader humility research has progressed significantly since the first systematic review of its theological, philosophical, and psychological roots (Tangney, 2002) and the first study showing that humble CEOs are effective (Collins, 2001). Across disciplines (McElroy-Heltzel, Davis, DeBlaere, Worthington Jr, & Hook, 2019), the definition of humility includes three commonly recognized and mutually related dimensions (Ou et al., 2014; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013) which are (1) the willingness to know oneself accurately; (2) an appreciation for others' strengths and contributions; and (3) being teachable and open to ideas and advice. This rich, multidimensional conceptualization effectively established humility as a distinct, sophisticated construct rather than its simpler description in servant or spiritual leadership literatures (Fry, 2003; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Humble leaders tend to be subordinate-centered, to cultivate psychologically safe environments and legitimate subordinate development, and to empower subordinates to lead and perform (Chiu, Owens, & Tesluk, 2016; Hu et al., 2018; Rego et al., 2019). Nevertheless, researchers are concerned that such approaches may cause humble leaders to avoid self-promotion or self-entitlement, leading them to fail in career competitions (Dik et al., 2017). Owens and Hekman (2012) suspected that humble leaders may not be well received in cultures of competition and rivalry. Ou and colleagues (2018) considered that competitive executive selection and succession processes may result in fewer humble CEOs. Pfeffer even proposed that "immodesty (i.e., lack of humility) in all its manifestations—narcissism, self-aggrandizement, unwarranted self-confidence"—may be a better way to attain leadership positions and organizational rewards (Pfeffer, 2015, p. 72).

However, impression management research indicates that self-centered tactics have nonsignificant or even negative effects on performance ratings (for a meta-analytic review, see Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). Instead, subordinate-centeredness is likely to cause subordinates to reciprocate with trust, acceptance, social capital, and favorable performance ratings (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Therefore, we sought to discover whether humble leaders who were the center of subordinates' networks would reap performance and career benefits. According to cumulative empirical evidence, humble leaders are generally effective in delivering team and organizational performance (Hu et al., 2018; Ou et al., 2018; Rego et al., 2019); however, much less research has been devoted to humble leaders' career success, an essential actor-centered benefit and core topic in organizational behavior research (Byington, Felps, & Baruch, 2019; Spurk, Hirschi, & Dries, 2019; Wang & Wanberg, 2017), yet under-studied in subordinate-centered leadership (Dik et al., 2017; Panaccio et al., 2015).

Researchers acknowledge that network connections provide valuable social capital for gaining influence, information, and resources, and studies tend to focus on upward or lateral rather than downward ties (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Career success studies often recommend contacts with other functionaries, peers, senior staff, and mentors (Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 2010; Fang et al., 2015; Seibert et al., 2001; Seibert, Sargent, Kraimer, & Kiazad, 2017; Tharenou, 2001; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). A most recent review also identified supervisory rather than subordinate support as a proximal environmental resource for career success (Spurk et al., 2019).

While these upward or lateral ties are indeed important, the value of downward ties may be overlooked. To extend the social network-career success inquiry, we build on an ecosystem perspective of leadership and followership (Crocker, 2008; Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014),

emphasizing that leaders can advance through connections with subordinates. From this viewpoint (Crocker, 2008), leaders and subordinates work interdependently in an ecosystem in which those who improve the welfare of other members receive positive repercussions. Subordinates who receive benefits from humble leaders are likely to reciprocate, for example, by giving leaders helpful information (Morrison, 2014) and a central position in their social networks, which raises the leaders' influence (Mehra, Dixon, Brass, & Robertson, 2006). Accordingly, we expect that leaders' network centrality in subordinates' voice networks serves as a unique form of social capital that can lead to career success. Our study complements existing research adopting a similar social network perspective that also supports the benefits of leaders' network centrality within the team, among peers, or with their own superiors (Venkataramani et al., 2014).

Humble Leaders in Subordinates' Voice Networks

Although voice carries invaluable information and is most beneficial to organizations when directed upward to leaders, voice can flow to and around leaders (Detert et al., 2013). In other words, subordinates form a voice network that may include or exclude the leader, and failing to occupy a central position in this network may be detrimental to the leader. Subordinates can remain silent to their leaders if they feel no obligation to speak or they judge that doing so is risky or futile (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012). In contrast, they speak up when voice is encouraged and safe and leaders are willing and able to take action (Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012).

We propose that humble leaders gain central positions in subordinates' voice networks by encouraging voice. Humble leaders invest substantial effort to develop subordinates (Owens & Hekman, 2016), which heightens their sense of obligation to reciprocate with supportive upward

voice to improve team functioning. As humble leaders admit their limitations and appreciate the strengths of others, they increase subordinates' sense of competence and create safe environments for speaking up (Hu et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2013). Moreover, humble leaders and subordinates form mutually trusting relationships (Peters, Rowat, & Johnson, 2011), which assures subordinates that their relationships are resilient to implicit or explicit challenges inherent in voice expression. Finally, humble leaders demonstrate a constant desire to grow when they invite subordinates' opinions and comments (Chiu et al., 2016) and indicate that they will seriously consider subordinates' voice to create meaningful change. Based on these arguments and recent findings (Li, Liang, Zhang, & Wang, 2018), we propose that humble leaders draw greater subordinate voice and become more central in subordinates' voice networks.

Hypothesis 1: Humility is positively related to leaders' in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks.

Humble Leaders in Competitive Work Contexts

As modern organizations face growing external environmental uncertainty and competition, intra-organizational competition is also intensified, because intra-organizational units have to compete for resources and demand for autonomy to rapidly respond to external changes (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986; Birkinshaw & Lingblad, 2005). As a result, employees also experience immense intra-organizational competition (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1998; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Competitive work contexts[1] are fundamentally rooted in aggressiveness and competitiveness and characterized by management styles that drive employees to accomplish goals and achieve success (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2008). For example, under Jack Welch in the 1980s and 1990s, General Electric cultivated a strongly competitive environment that emphasized being first or second in the markets, rewarded top performers and

dismissed those at the bottom. In such contexts, employees compete with each other for recognitions and rewards associated with performance rankings (Brown et al., 1998).

Although we do not dismiss the possibility that competitive contexts may disfavor humble leaders in general, we argue that these environments may in fact strengthen the path linking leader humility to centrality in subordinates' voice networks. When subordinates consider whether to use their voice, they will look to both the work context and their leaders for social information (Dutton, Ashford, O'neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Li, Liang, & Farh, 2020; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Competitive contexts heighten both the benefits and costs of voice, and thus send competing signals. Voice can be beneficial if it increases subordinates' visibility to leaders and helps them outperform others (Grant & Mayer, 2009); however, it can be costly if leaders—the performance evaluators and reward allocators—perceive the voice to be challenging or critical. Therefore, in competitive contexts, subordinates seek social cues from leaders to navigate this ambivalence and the advisability of voicing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Tangirala, Kamdar, Venkataramani, & Parke, 2013). As humble leaders clearly signal that voice is safe and warrants positive outcomes, subordinates will be more inclined to respond. Therefore, we expect that:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Competitive work contexts moderate the relationship between leader humility and their centrality in subordinates' voice networks; a stronger positive relationship occurs in competitive work environments.

Centrality in Team Voice Networks, Leader Performance, and Career Success

In addition, we propose that leaders who occupy central positions in subordinates' voice networks will be more effective leaders, and in turn, achieve a higher level of career success. Leader performance is the extent to which the leaders meet expectations in performing their jobs,

roles, and responsibilities (Tsui, 1984). Superiors, peers, and subordinates rate leader performance differently because they have access to different performance-related information (Tsui & Ohlott, 1988). In our study, we rely on the evaluation of superiors because they are more likely to determine whether leaders receive rewards or punishments. Career success refers to the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences (Seibert et al., 2001), which may be measured extrinsically—salary increases and promotions—or intrinsically—career satisfaction (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Wang & Wanberg, 2017). In our study, we focus on an extrinsic indicator—reward recommendation, which shows that superiors recommend leaders for salary increases, promotions, professional development, public recognition, and high-profile projects (Allen & Rush, 1998).

We expect that in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks provides both information and influence for humble leaders to be more effective (Detert et al., 2013). Voice is one of the most supportive forms of followership, because supportive subordinates do not demonstrate dysfunctional resistance or blind obedience to leaders, but rather, actively "stand up to and for" leaders and proactively assist them to achieve team or organizational goals (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Voice provides leaders with information that is otherwise only privately available to the subordinates (Morrison, 2014), thus enabling leaders to use more comprehensive information and make better decisions. Leaders may also discover improvements to be made and ways to design more effective work practices and procedures. Relatedly, leaders who occupy centrality in subordinates' voice networks interact with a variety of subordinates to obtain divergent perspectives; therefore, they may gain an earlier, more comprehensive sense of environmental challenges and can proactively modify current practices or initiate new projects. Finally, in-degree centrality in subordinates' social networks provides leaders with greater influence which

can be used to mobilize and coordinate subordinates to fulfill the leader's agenda (Venkataramani et al., 2014) and toward greater performance.

Leaders with greater performance are more likely to impress their upper management and receive recognitions from their superiors. High performers are valuable human capital, and organizations strive to motivate and retain them through recognitions and rewards, including reward recommendations (Gurbuz, Habiboglu, & Bingol, 2016). Furthermore, performance-based reward systems are a widely adopted human resource practice for maintaining competitive advantage (Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Wang & Wanberg, 2017). Therefore, we expect that leader performance relates positively to reward recommendations. We propose:

> *Hypothesis 3:* In-degree centrality in a team voice network indirectly relates to leaders' extrinsic career success as indicated by reward recommendation via a positive association with leader performance.

Integrative Model

Figure 1 illustrates our research model in which we combine the relationships to explain how and when humble leaders may indirectly achieve career success. Integrating Hypotheses 1 and 3, we propose a serial mediation model explaining that centrality in subordinates' voice networks and leader performance sequentially connects leader humility to career success.

> *Hypothesis 4:* Leader humility indirectly relates to leaders' career success as indicated by reward recommendation via the sequential effects of (a) in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks and (b) leader performance.

Integrating Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, we propose a moderated mediation model explaining how competitive work context moderates the indirect paths from leader humility to career success by strengthening the path of in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks.

> *Hypothesis 5:* Competitive work context is a first-stage moderator of the indirect effect of leader humility on career success, sequentially via (a) in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks and (b) leader performance; a stronger relationship occurs under competitive work contexts.

Overview of Studies

We conducted two studies to examine the effects of humility on leaders' career success. In Study 1, we examined the overall model in a two-wave, multisource field study of real estate agencies. Then, to address causality concerns in Study 1, we used an experimental design in Study 2 with a sample of working adults in which we tested Hypothesis 1 (leader humility affecting in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks) and Hypothesis 2 (competitive work context as a moderator). Both studies were conducted in China where humility is a deep-rooted cultural virtue (Carus, 1909; Legge, 1991; Wilhelm & Baynes, 2011); while vertical collectivism and power distance are prevalent there, *guanxi* or a system of interpersonal relationships is essential (Takeuchi, Wang, & Farh, 2020). Similar humility research has been conducted in the Chinese context (Ou et al., 2014; Qin et al., 2020).

Study 1

We tested the integrative research model in a dataset obtained from 34 outlets of a large real estate agency chain in Beijing. We selected this business because it is generally a rather competitive environment, yet agents work in teams to collaborate and compete to obtain rentable or sellable property information and secure tenants or buyers.

We chose supervisors from the branches with geographically proximal locations within the same company in order to hold constant the impact of performance appraisal criteria and the external economic environment. To achieve high response rates, we visited each of the shops, greeted each of the shop managers, introduced the study to all members in the shops, distributed the survey, and gave participants small gifts as tokens of appreciation after they completed the questionnaires and returned them in sealed envelopes. The final sample included 114 supervisors (response rate 100%), their 461 subordinates (95%), and 34 shop managers (100%). The average age of the supervisors was 31.55 years (SD = 6.73); 67.9% were men; and 43.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Their average company tenure was 39.79 months (SD = 35.76), and they supervised an average of four agents (SD = 1.66). Among subordinates, the average age was 26.02 years (SD = 6.77); 57% were men; and 77.9% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Their average tenure was 16.07 months (SD = 21.77) and their tenure with their supervisors averaged 8.39 months (SD = 8.68).

We used a two-wave, multisource research design to alleviate common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). At time 1, supervisors reported their demographics; subordinates rated their supervisors' humility and competitive work context and reported their voice network; and shop managers assessed the supervisors' performance. At time 2 (a month later), shop managers provided reward recommendation information about the supervisors.

Measures

As some of the original measures were in English, we adopted the translation/back-translation process (Brislin, 1970) to ensure the survey scales were accurate. Leader humility, competitive work context, narcissism (control variable), and leader-member exchange (control

variable) were rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. All measures were shown in Appendix A.

Leader humility. Subordinates assessed supervisors' humility (α = .92) using the Chinese version (Ou et al., 2014) of a 9-item measure of humility (Owens et al., 2013). We aggregated subordinates' ratings for each supervisor. The aggregation statistics represented reasonable within-group agreement and between-group differences (Bliese, 2000), such that ICC (1) = .20, ICC (2) = .50, $F = 1.98$ $p = .000$, and mean $r_{wg(j)\ uniform} = .96$.

Competitive work context. Subordinates assessed competitive work context with 4 items[2] (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) (α = .80). A sample item was "The management style in the organization is characterized by hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement." We changed the reference point to the shop in which the subordinates worked. Before aggregation, we followed Raudenbush and Bryk (2002) to examine the variances of data at the shop, team, and individual levels. The competitive work context data had significant variances at the individual (81%, p = .000) and team (12%, p = .031) levels, but no variance at the shop level (7%, p = .144), suggesting data aggregation at the shop level was unnecessary. We verified this finding with the regional human resource director. She explained that the company uses an individual-based competitive incentive scheme, but subordinates tend to have frequent within-team interactions, and thus, form shared, within-team understanding about shop contexts. Therefore, we treated competitive work context as a team-level variable, and aggregated the data based on acceptable team-level aggregation statistics: ICC (1) = .21, ICC (2) = .52, F = 2.09, p = .000, and mean $r_{wg(j)uniform} = .94$.

In-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks. We constructed a single-item question to measure in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks, following the norm in

social network analysis (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Specifically, we gave agents a list of all subordinates and the supervisor and asked them to indicate each person with whom they usually shared ideas or suggestions to improve shop management. This was a valid approach because we focused on a rather unambiguous construct (Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006) and developed the question based on a well-established voice measure (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In other words, our question captured the essence of the voice definition concerning the constructive expression of suggestions or ideas for organizational improvements or changes (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Each supervisor's in-degree centrality in the voice network was the number of ties directed to the focal supervisor, divided by team size, minus 1 (Fang et al., 2015).

Leader performance. Shop managers rated supervisors' performance using the Chinese version (Zhang, LePine, Buckman, & Wei, 2014) of a 4-item measure from Van Dyne & LePine ($\alpha = .84$; 1998), with a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *below average* to 5 = *above average*. A sample item was "She/he adequately completes responsibilities." The measure was appropriate because it comprehensively reflected supervisors' job responsibilities (Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009) and was consistent with the leadership functions in teams (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010).

Career success as indicated by reward recommendations. Managers responded to a Chinese version (Shi, Johnson, Liu, & Wang, 2013) of Allen and Rush's (1998) 5-item scale, indicating the extent to which they would recommend a supervisor for the following rewards ($\alpha = .93$): salary increase, promotion, high-profile project, public recognition, and professional development. We used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *absolutely not recommend* to 5 = *recommend without reservation*.

Control variables. We included control variables to rule out alternative explanations for the observed relationships. For in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks, we controlled for two demographic variables and one psychological attribute. The demographic variables were education (1 = junior high school or below, 2 = high school, 3 = junior college, 4 = bachelor's degree, 5 = master's degree, 6 = doctorate) and company tenure, which are key human capital indicators (Seibert et al., 2001). We also included the psychological attribute of leader narcissism (Zhang, Ou, Tsui, & Wang, 2017), which helped us examine whether humility explained variance in subordinate-related outcomes beyond a contrasting attribute.

For leader performance and career success, we controlled for leaders' relationships with their managers (i.e., leader-member-exchange, LMX) to examine whether ties with subordinates explained unique variance. Leaders' LMX with their managers was measured with the Chinese version (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002) of 8 items from Bauer and Green (1996): $\alpha = .81$; a sample item was "I usually know where I stand with my supervisor."

Analytic Strategy

We had a nested dataset with supervisors embedded within shops, but our model concerned supervisor-level relationships only, and competitive work context had no significant shop-level variance. Therefore, we used cluster-robust standard errors in MPLUS 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) to account for data nesting within shops (McNeish, Stapleton, & Silverman, 2017).

We ran a path model with main effects to test Hypothesis 1, and then added the moderator of competitive work context and its interaction term with leader humility to test Hypothesis 2. Predictors were grand-mean-centered before generating the interaction term (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991). To test Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 which involved mediation and

moderated mediation, we used Preacher and Selig's (2012) Monte Carlo bootstrapping approach in R, which has more power to detect indirect effects and can be used in nested data (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). We first obtained estimates and asymptotic variances for direct effects from our fitted model, and then generated 100,000 simulated parameter sets with 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables. Tables 2 and 3 show the overall path analysis results with and without the interaction term, based on the mediation models. Model 1 in Table 2 shows that leader humility positively related to in-degree centrality in the team voice network (b = .12, SE = .04, p = .002), supporting Hypothesis 1. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, Model 1 in Table 3 shows that the interaction term of leader humility and competitive work context significantly related to in-degree centrality in the team voice network (b = .21, SE = .09, p = .017). Leader humility had a stronger positive relationship with in-degree centrality in subordinates' voice networks in a high-competitive context (b = .21, SE = .04, p = .000) rather than in a low-competitive context (b = .01, SE = .07, p = .863). Figure 2 shows the simple slope plot (the moderator set to two standard deviations above and below mean value) and confidence intervals.

Insert Tables 1, 2, 3, & Figure 2 about here

Regarding Hypothesis 3, Table 2 shows that voice network centrality related positively to leader performance (Model 2: b = .84, SE = .39, p = .030) and leader performance positively related to reward recommendation (Model 3: b = .51, SE = .14, p = .000). In addition, voice network centrality had a significant indirect effect on reward recommendation (indirect effect

= .43, 95% CI = [.03, .96]). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Moreover, the indirect effect from leader humility to reward recommendation through in-degree centrality in team voice network and leader performance was .05, with 95% CI = (.002, .15); therefore, the significant indirect effect supported Hypothesis 4.

We further tested the conditional indirect effects from leader humility to reward recommendation in high and low competitive work contexts. As Table 4 shows, in a high-competitive context, leader humility had a stronger indirect effect on reward recommendation through in-degree centrality in team voice network and leader performance (indirect effect = .09, 95% CI = [.01, .20]); however, under a low-competitive context, the indirect effect was weaker (indirect effect = .01, 95% CI = [-.04, .12]). The difference test between conditional indirect effects under high and low competitive contexts was significant: b = .09, 95% CI = (.001, .16). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported. All told, the results supported our contention that humble leaders achieve reward recommendation via occupying central positions in team voice networks, and the relationship is stronger in competitive work contexts.

Insert Table 4 about here

Our research design might lead to some reverse causality concerns, since leader humility, in-degree voice network centrality, and leader performance were all measured at time 1 (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Humility is a relatively stable personal characteristic and exogenous factor (Owens et al., 2013), so we examined two alternative models that switched the sequences of centrality in team voice network and leader performance.

In the first alternative model, we tested whether humility or centrality in voice network predicted leader performance concurrently rather than sequentially. In the second alternative

model, we tested whether leader performance preceded centrality in voice network. We compared the two alternative models with the main effect model in Table 2 (AIC = 355.74), using the non-nested model comparison statistic, Akaike's information criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1987). The two alternative models generated a worse fit with larger AICs (AIC = 423.73, Δ = 67.99; AIC = 365.11, Δ = 9.37; respectively). In addition, humility had an insignificant direct path to leader performance in both models (b = -.05, SE = .18, p = .776, and .09, SE = .17, p = .619, respectively), whereas centrality in voice network had a significant direct path to leader performance (b = .84, SE = .39, p = .030 in Table 2). These findings suggest that voice network centrality rather than humility was a more proximal predictor of leader performance. The results support the mediation sequence proposed in our hypotheses.

Study 1 Discussion

Study 1 generally supported the research model, but research design limitations prevented a full testing of causality. That is, in Study 1, we measured humility and voice from the same source (subordinates) and at the same time (time 1) for Hypothesis 1. For Hypothesis 2, we measured shop-level competitive context, but found only team-level variance. Therefore, we conducted a vignette-based experiment in Study 2 to test Hypotheses 1 and 2 further. Aguinis and Bradley (2014) have suggested that using vignettes can help increase experimental realism while manipulating the independent variables and assessing dependent variables such as intentions and behaviors.

Study 2

We designed experimental vignettes about leader humility and competitive work contexts, following studies on leader humility (e.g., Owens & Hekman, 2016; Rego et al., 2019)

and Aguinis and Bradley's (2014) recommendations. This method is an appropriate way to allow participants to imagine experiences of upward voice.

Sample

To increase external validity, we targeted a generalized population familiar with our proposed leadership context (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). We recruited 298 full-time working adults through alumni connections. Among these, 65 failed the attention check,[3] leaving a final sample of 233. The participants had an average age of 33.09 years (SD = 6.64); 51.5% were women, and 99.6% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Their workplaces represented a broad range of industries (21% manufacturing, 26.2% service and retail, and 52.8% others), firm size (46.8% with fewer than 500 employees, and 53.2% with 500 or more), firm age (76.4% were 10 years old or more; 16.3% were 3–10 years old; 7.3% were less than 3 years old), and ownership nature (30% state-owned, 40.4% public or private, 19.8% foreign or joint ventures, and 9.8% others).

Design

To hold leader gender and competence constant and offer sufficient contextual background, we gave all participants the same general introduction to read, which invited them to imagine working for a manager named Yang Liu (a typical name in China), a star performer in Company A. A more detailed description about the manager and the company followed the introduction. We used a 2 X 2 between-subject design to avoid participant fatigue, and manipulated leader humility (1 = humble, 0 = non-humble) and work context conditions (1 = competitive, 0 = control). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes with leader and work context information. The vignettes were consistent with lifelike workplace scenarios to generate participant immersion (See Appendix B).

Similar to Rego et al. (2019), we described a humble or non-humble leader based on items from Owens et al. (2013). More specifically, we emphasized that humble leaders tend to see themselves accurately, appreciate others, and willingly learn from them. We based our descriptions of competitive work contexts on the descriptions for market cultures (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The control condition was a neutral description of work contexts in a typical organization.

According to their assigned conditions, participants were asked to imagine working for the leader and company and to evaluate their likelihood of voicing to the leader. In-degree voice network centrality largely indicates the number of voicing subordinates (adjusted by team size), and therefore, an individual subordinate's voicing likelihood is a prerequisite for high voice network centrality. Participants responded to five voice-related scenarios (α =.96) adapted from Van Dyne and LePine's (1998) voice measures, using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*). A sample scenario was "You have some suggestions for issues that may influence the department. How likely are you to raise them to the leader?"

At the end of the experiment, participants answered manipulation check questions about humility and competitive work context. Humility (α = .94) was measured with 3 items adapted from Owens et al. (2013): "He is willing to view his strengths and weaknesses accurately"; "He can appreciate the strengths and contributions of others"; "He is open to others' ideas and advice." Competitive work context (α = .88) was measured with 3 items adapted from Cameron and Quinn (2011): "This company is results-oriented"; "The colleagues in this company are competitive"; "This company emphasizes achievement and aggressiveness."

Results

As expected, the manipulation checks suggested that participants with the humble leader

scenario (M = 5.94, SD = 1.25) rated the leader as significantly more humble than participants in the non-humble one (M = 2.68, SD = 1.39; t [231] = 18.72, p = .000). Participants in the competitive work context scenario (M = 6.08, SD = 0.97) rated the culture as significantly more competitive than those in the control condition, which lacked the competitive context (M = 4.56, SD = 1.25; t [231] = 10.30, p = .000).

We used univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the interactive effects of leader humility and a competitive work context. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants were more likely to voice to humble leaders (M = 5.93, SD = 1.02) than to non-humble ones (M = 4.16, SD = 1.60): F (1, 231) = 96.52, p = .000, η^2 = 0.30). Therefore, humility had a significant main effect on a leader's receiving voice.

Supporting Hypothesis 2, we found that leader humility had a significant interaction effect with competitive work context, as shown in Table 5: F (1, 229) = 5.85, p = .02, η^2 = .03. In the competitive condition, participants with humble leaders reported more voice behaviors (M = 5.98, 95% CI [5.610, 6.351], SD = 1.10) than those with non-humble leaders (M = 3.77, 95% CI [3.422, 4.111], SD = 1.50, t [108] = - 8.72, p = .000). In the control condition, participants with humble leaders also reported more voice (M = 5.88, 95% CI [5.530, 6.231], SD = .96) than those with non-humble leaders (M = 4.52, 95% CI [4.196, 4.847], SD = 1.62, t [121] = -5.54, p = .000). However, analyses revealed that the voice behavior difference between low and high humility conditions was much larger in the competitive work context scenario (difference score = -2.21, η2 = .41) than in the control (difference score = -1.36, η2 = .20). As Figure 3 shows, humility had a stronger effect on voice under a competitive work context than under the control, consistent with Hypothesis 2.

Insert Table 5 and Figure 3 about here

Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 supported both the humility-voice relationship (Hypothesis 1) and the moderating role of a competitive work context (Hypothesis 2). The experimental design allowed us to infer the causal relationships and exclude other confounding factors. The sample of working adults from various industries, firm sizes, firm ages, and ownership types substantiated external validity.

Overall Discussion

In these two studies, we examined whether, how, and when humble leaders can achieve extrinsic career success as indicated by reward recommendation. Our findings suggest that humble leaders benefit from occupying central positions in subordinates' voice networks, which make them more effective and earn favorable reward recommendations. The benefit is resilient even in competitive work contexts.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions. First, by showing that humble leaders can achieve career success via central positions in subordinates' networks, we provide encouraging empirical evidence that subordinate-centered, humble leaders have positive career prospects. Researchers warn that an orientation toward others, or prosocial orientation, may deplete egos, exhaust cognitive resources, and delay work progress (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Lin, Ma, & Johnson, 2016). Although these are valid concerns, we suggest that a prosocial orientation does not necessarily hinder career success. This study adds to emerging findings showing that humility benefits employees' promotability (Li et al., 2020), and confirms that humility also benefits leaders' careers. Our study emphasizes that serving others leads to the

career success of humble leaders themselves using a social network perspective. In addition, our analysis indicates that humility has the same indirect effects on reward recommendation for both genders. This finding is encouraging and informative for other subordinate-centered leadership research, such as servant leadership; that is, servant leaders also may be able to utilize downward social capital to increase their job performance and career success.

Similarly, our study sheds light on the additional influence mechanisms and boundary conditions concerning humble leadership. Building on findings that humble leaders promote subordinate voice (Li et al., 2018), we aggregated individual subordinate voice to the leader level, examined it as a network position that offers downward social capital, and studied leader-centric performance and career outcomes. In this way, our study illuminates the underexplored structural benefits of leader humility, moves beyond existing humility studies that mainly document leaders' behavioral influences, and answers the call for a social network view of leadership (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). In addition, we add competitive work context to the list of factors that enable or hinder the performance of humble leaders. Researchers acknowledge that humble leaders perform better in highly proactive or low-power-distance teams (Chiu et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2018), but tend to doubt their adequacy in competitive work contexts (Ou et al., 2018; Owens & Hekman, 2012). We offer a new insight regarding the benefits of humility: Humble leaders can thrive in disadvantageous environments by supplying the psychological and motivational resources subordinates need.

Second, in contributing to the literature on voice, our study offers evidence that receiving voice improves leader performance and career success. Although other research examines the implications of voice for teams and organizations (Detert et al., 2013; Li et al., 2017; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011) as well as for individuals who initiate it (Whiting,

Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012), we know little about whether voice benefits leaders, who are important recipients and facilitators of voice in organizations. We demonstrate that leaders who encourage upward voice reap the benefit of becoming better performers and obtaining reward recommendation. Hence, we highlight how leaders who encourage subordinate voice can create positive repercussions for themselves.

Third, our study provides new understanding regarding the relationship between personal attributes and career success. Research indicates that personal attributes motivate or enable individuals to obtain human capital and central network positions, which are known predictors of career success (Fang et al., 2015; Harris & Ogbonna, 2006; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Yet these studies focus on the most popular attributes such as the big five personality traits, self-monitoring, or proactivity (Fang et al., 2015). We add humility, an underexplored attribute, to the list of career-relevant personal traits. Moreover, studies tend to overlook leaders' ties to lower status individuals, and instead, mainly emphasize the value of upward social capital or ties with equal or higher-status individuals such as peers, supervisors, or career sponsors (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019). Our study shows that valuable downward social capital comes from a leader's ties with lower status subordinates. Leaders' central positions in subordinates' voice networks explain additional variance in leader performance and reward recommendation, even after controlling for the more commonly studied human capital and relationships with superiors. In addition, although researchers have proposed that contextual factors such as organizational culture and reward systems can affect how personal attributes relate to career outcomes, our study is among the pioneers to identify the moderating effect of competitive work contexts (Heslin, Keating, & Minbashian, 2019; Spurk et al., 2019).

Practical Implications

An important task of human resource management is to identify and promote effective leaders in organizations (Conger & Benjamin, 1999; Conner, 2000); however, this charge is increasingly challenging, as global financial, health, and environmental crises are more frequent, disruptive technological revolutions more unpredictable, and major corporate scandals more apparent. Both researchers and practitioners are turning to humble leaders as the solution with the idea that recognizing personal limitations and relying on others' expertise can enable leaders to cope better with uncertainty and complexity (Argandona, 2015; Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005). However, humble leaders are still relatively rare in organizations (Pfeffer, 2015) because leaders may not perceive that humility is beneficial to their careers and organizations may be unaware of barriers to encouraging humility. Our study offers several practical suggestions for organizations and managers in this situation.

First, we suggest that human resource managers should proactively select, reward, and promote humble managers who build empowering, psychologically safe environments (Hu et al., 2018; Ou et al., 2014). While our study identifies a pathway for humble managers to attain career success (voice network centrality), they still may face challenging competition from self-promoting leaders who may not necessarily excel in performance, but nonetheless gain visibility and favor (Pfeffer, 2015). Superiors and organizations that support self-promoting leaders and undervalue humble managers risk cultivating toxic workplaces and promoting abusive supervision (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Therefore, consciously providing attractive career prospects to humble managers and removing career barriers can benefit organizations.

Second, organizations with competitive work contexts should be particularly encouraged to promote humble leaders because they will be resilient in attracting employee voice. Although competitive contexts increase organizational effectiveness, they reduce psychological safety and

well-being, and increase employee undermining and stress (Fletcher et al., 2008). As researchers and practitioners acknowledge that modern management can harm employee health and increasing healthcare costs for organizations (Pfeffer, 2018), humble leaders are even more valuable as a buffer to these detriments. Therefore, organizations with competitive contexts may have to make extra effort to attract and retain humble leaders because these leaders may be more attracted to other organizations due to their supplementary fit with organizational cultures valuing collaboration and teamwork (Rego et al., 2019; Owens & Hekman, 2016).

Third, we encourage managers to practice humility without reservation. Although self-promotion or taking credit for others' work may seem shrewd strategies for promotion, we show that leaders who are subordinate-centered can satisfy their career aspirations through creating downward social capital. When humble leaders develop and benefit their subordinates, subordinates reciprocate to help them improve leader performance and achieve career goals. Relatedly, leadership trainers can combine our study with other evidence about leader humility (Wallace et al., 2017) to promote humility training.

Limitations and Future Research

Our studies provide convergent evidence for the research model, although each has limitations. We encourage future research to extend our explorations in several ways. First, we examined only one mechanism—network centrality in subordinates' voice networks—that links leader humility to career success. A related but unaddressed puzzle is whether humble leaders can impress their superiors. Although humble leaders are less likely to engage in self-centered impression management (Bourdage, Wiltshire, & Lee, 2015), can they employ other-centered impression management tactics, such as ingratiation? When humble leaders proactively seek feedback from superiors and show willingness to learn, ingratiation appears genuine and may

evoke positive performance ratings and promotions (Gurbuz et al., 2016; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Moreover, one recent research has shown that if employees have low humility than their supervisors, employees will experience more negative affect toward leaders (Qin, Liu, Brown, Zheng, & Owens, 2021) and thus may be less likely to develop close ties with their leaders. Future research can look more into how the congruence of humility between leaders and followers can generate different outcomes.

Second, our research is among a few pioneering efforts that show actor-centric outcomes for humble leaders (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019). Future researchers can explore other important actor-centric consequences, such as how humble leaders perform in job interviews. Although humble leaders may be rewarded after superiors know them for a long time, they may be less able to compete with deceptive, assertive self-promotors who can bias job interviewers (Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2015). Another concern is the ability to make good decisions. By preferring more comprehensive information processing and participative decision-making (Ou et al., 2014), humble leaders may deliberate too slowly for rapidly changing environments (Eisenhardt, 1989). We hope our research stimulates more inquiries into actor-centric outcomes.

Third, we conducted our research in China, and it is unclear whether the findings can be generalized to other cultures. While humble leaders have been found to be effective in both Western and Eastern cultures (for a review, see Wallace et al., 2017), it is unclear whether they can achieve career success in Western cultures. The most influential philosophies in China—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—all regard humility as a beneficial practice for wisdom and success (Carus, 1909; Legge, 1991; Wilhelm & Baynes, 2011). However, humility is inconsistent with Western expectations of leaders such as dominance and masculinity (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Researchers in the United States caution that humble

leaders' success may be contingent upon demonstrated competence and supportive contexts (Owens & Hekman, 2012; Pfeffer, 2015). In addition, social capital is universally important, but the form in which it is most useful may differ across cultures. For example, structural holes have been found to be effective in Western cultures, but less so in China (Xiao & Tsui, 2007). We hope that future studies will explore the career and social capital implications of humble leaders in the Western context.

Fourth, our research focuses on a broad behavioral conceptualization of leader humility, but valuable information could be gleaned from narrower, domain-specific conceptualizations. For example, Owens, Yam, Bednar, Mao, and Hart (2019) focused on moral humility and found that leaders who are willing to admit limits, mistakes, and biases in moral issues decrease followers' unethical behaviors. Relatedly, people with political humility or intellectual humility are more willing to appreciate opposite political perspectives and relate to political opponents (Hodge, Hook, Van Tongeren, Davis, & McElroy-Heltzel 2020; Stanley, Sinclair, & Seli, 2020), and people with cultural humility are more capable of initiating positive contacts with culturally different individuals (Hook & Watkin, 2015). We encourage future research into whether broadly defined or domain-specific features of humility affect leader performance and career success differently.

Fifth, we only studied a sample of junior leaders, and is unclear whether our model also applies to more senior leaders. Considering competence is a necessary condition for humble leaders to be effective (Owens & Hekman, 2012), future studies can examine whether humble senior leaders are more likely to be effective given that people are less likely to doubt their competence. Moreover, our sample consists of supervisors and leaders with a relatively small age gap. It is possible that these supervisors use downward social capital more actively than

upward social capital. It would be interesting to conduct a study to see whether our theory applies to situations when supervisors and subordinates have a larger age gap while supervisors and their managers are closer in age.

Conclusion

To help organizations cultivate compassion, alleviate human suffering, and enhance employee well-being (Peus, 2011), management researchers suggest promoting subordinate-centered leadership characteristics, such as humility. However, others argue that such leadership may be "too much of a good thing" in competitive business environments (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Pfeffer, 2015). Our findings that humble leaders can benefit from ties with subordinates and obtain reward recommendation demonstrate that humility carries long-term benefits for leaders. We encourage researchers to examine further how organizations can promote humility in leadership and remove obstacles to its effectiveness.

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FOOTNOTES

1. We use the term *work context* rather than *culture* or *climate* because researchers recognize that both culture and climate theories are metaphors for organizational social contexts (Schneider, Gonzalez-Roma, Ostroff, & West, 2017).

2. We eliminated two items concerning strategic emphases and organizational success criteria because they are more relevant to strategic goals rather than contextual descriptions.

3. We excluded participants who failed the attention check question which asked them to choose *somewhat unlikely* if they were paying attention.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables in Study 1

	Variables	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Education	3.03	1.23	106	-									
2.	Company tenure	39.79	35.76	108	-.23*	-								
3.	Narcissism ($T1^L$)	4.15	0.89	110	-.07	-.01	(.90)							
4.	LMX with manager ($T1^L$)	5.10	0.76	111	-.05	-.05	.36**	(.81)						
5.	Humility ($T1^S$)	5.42	0.44	114	-.03	.11	-.01	.11	(.92)					
6.	Competitive work context ($T1^S$)	5.24	0.47	114	.08	-.06	.25**	.01	.33**	(.80)				
7.	Humility * Competitive context	0.07	0.19	114	.10	-.04	.05	.04	.06	.18	-			
8.	Indegree centrality in voice network($T1^S$)	0.60	0.18	113	-.02	.02	.24*	.15	.28**	.16	.27**	-		
9.	Leader performance ($T1^M$)	3.46	0.75	114	-.11	.18	.16	.34**	.15	-.05	-.16	.26**	(.84)	
10.	Reward recommendation ($T2^M$)	4.46	0.84	95	.01	-.20	-.02	.18	.13	.04	-.01	.12	.41**	(.93)

Note. Coefficient reliability alphas are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. At time 1, subordinates rated $T1^S$ variables; supervisors rated $T1^L$ variables; shop managers rated $T1^M$ variables. At time 2, shop managers rated $T2^M$ variables; supervisors rated $T2^L$ variables.

Table 2

Summary of Path-Analytic Results of Hypothesis 1 in Study 1

Variables	Indegree centrality in voice network ($T1^S$) Model 1			Leader performance ($T1^M$) Model 2			Career success Reward recommendation ($T2^M$) Model 3		
	b	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*
Control									
Education	.00	.01	.981	-.02	.06	.779	-.04	.08	.652
Company tenure	.00	.00	.738	.00*	.00	.048	-.01+	.00	.088
Narcissism ($T1^L$)	.05**	.02	.005	-.00	.09	.973	-.12	.09	.190
LMX with manager ($T1^L$)				.28	.08	.000	.07	.16	.665
Independent variable									
Humility ($T1^S$)	.12**	.04	.002	-.05	.18	.776	.31	.25	.214
Mediator									
Indegree centrality in voice network ($T1^S$)				.84*	.39	.030	-.08	.45	.867
Leader performance ($T1^M$)							.51**	.14	.000
R^2	.15*	.07	.038	.17**	.06	.004	.28**	.09	.001

Note. + p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, two-tailed. Model fit: CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, and SRMR=.01. *b* = unstandardized path coefficient; SE = standard error, p = p value. At time 1, subordinates rated $T1^S$ variables; supervisors rated $T1^L$ variables; shop managers rated $T1^M$ variables. At time 2, shop managers rated $T2^M$ variables; supervisors rated $T2^L$ variables.

Table 3

Summary of Path-Analytic Results of Hypothesis 2 to 4 in Study 1[a]

Variables	Indegree centrality in voice network ($T1^S$) Model 1			Leader performance ($T1^M$) Model 2			Career success Reward recommendation ($T2^M$) Model 3		
	b	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*
Control									
Education	-.00	.01	.823	-.02	.06	.779	-.04	.08	.652
Company tenure	.00	.00	.806	.00*	.00	.048	-.01^{+}	.00	.088
Narcissism ($T1^L$)	.05**	.02	.004	-.00	.09	.973	-.12	.09	.190
LMX with manager ($T1^L$)				.28**	.08	.000	.07	.16	.665
Independent variable									
Humility ($T1^S$)	.11**	.04	.004	-.05	.18	.776	.31	.25	.214
Moderator									
Competitive context ($T1^S$)	-.01	.03	.782						
Interaction Term									
Humility * competitive context	.21*	.09	.017						
Mediator									
Indegree centrality in voice network ($T1^S$)				.84*	.39	.030	-.08	.45	.861
Leader performance ($T1^M$)							.51**	.14	.000
R^2	.20**	.07	.005	.18*	.06	.004	.28**	.09	.001

Note. $^{+}$ p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, two-tailed. Model fit: CFI =1.00, RMSEA = .00, and SRMR=.05.

b = unstandardized path coefficient; SE = standard error. At time 1, subordinates rated $T1^S$ variables; supervisors rated $T1^L$ variables; shop managers rated $T1^M$ variables. At time 2, shop managers rated $T2^M$ variables; supervisors rated $T2^L$ variables.

Table 4

Conditional Effects of Humility Through Voice Centrality and Leader Performance in Study 1

	Effects on Career Success (Reward Recommendation)				
	Path a (humility -> voice)	*Path b (voice ->performance)*	*Path c (performance -> referral)*	*Indirect effect*	*95% CI of Indirect effect*
High competitive context	.21** (.000)	.84* (.030)	.51** (.000)	.09*	(.01, .20)
Low competitive context	.01 (.863)	. 84* (.030)	.51** (.000)	.01	(-.04, .12)
Difference				.09*	(.00, .16)

Note. + p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, two-tailed. Path a is from humility to indegree centrality in voice network. Path b is from indegree centrality in voice network to leader performance. Path c is from leader performance to reward recommendation. All coefficients are unstandardized. Exact p values are included in the parentheses.

Table 5

Analysis of Variance of Leader Humility and Competitive Context on Voice in Study 2

Source	*F* value	p-value	η^2
Leader humility (humble vs. non-humble conditions)	102.27**	.000	.31
Competitive context (competitive vs. control conditions)	3.44	.065	.02
Leader humility X competitive context	5.85*	.016	.03

Note. The model is based on two-tailed tests; *df* =1, 229. η^2 = Partial eta squared.
* p < .05, ** p < .01, two-tailed.

Figure 1

A Theoretical Model of Leader Humility, Voice Network Centrality, and Reward Recommendation

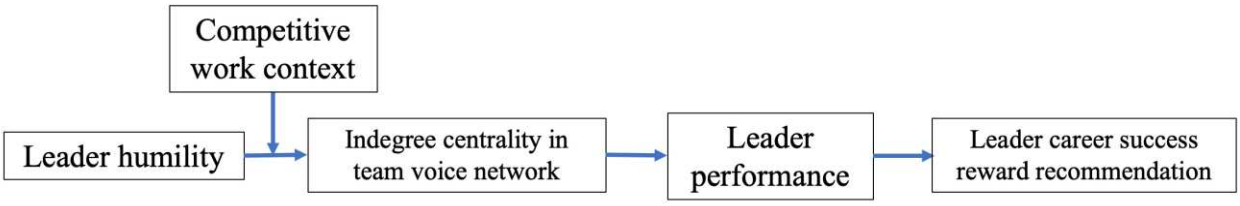


Figure 2

The Interaction Effect between Leader Humility and Competitive Work Context in Study 1

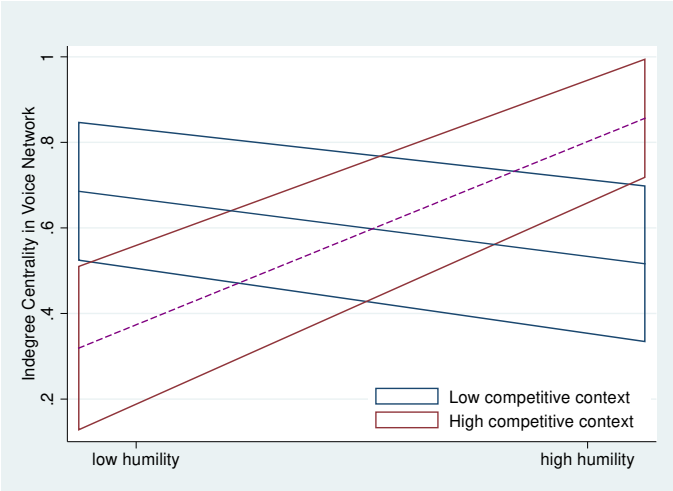
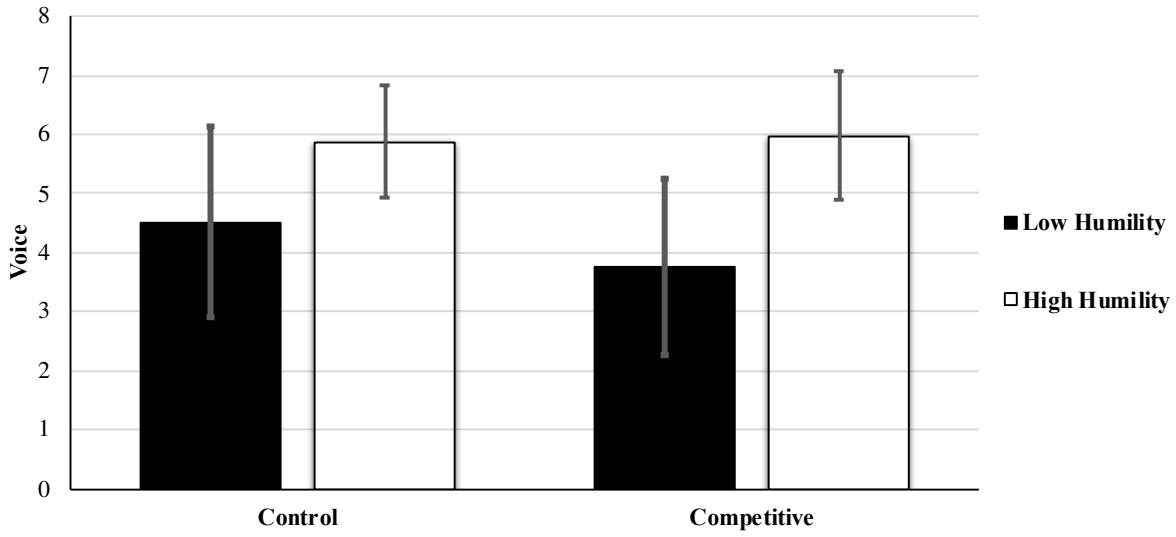


Figure 3

The Interactive Effect of Leader Humility and Competitive Work Context in Study 2



APPENDIX A

Key Measures used in Study 1

Leader humility (Owens et al., 2013)
He/She:

1. actively seek feedback even if it is critical.
2. acknowledges when others have more knowledge and skills than him/her.
3. admits when he/she doesn't know how to do something.
4. takes notice of others' strengths.
5. often compliments others on their strengths.
6. shows appreciation for the contributions of others.
7. is willing to learn from others.

Competitive work context (Cameron & Quinn, 2011)

1. The shop is very results oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement oriented.
2. The leadership in the shop is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus.
3. The management style in the shop is characterized by hard-driving, competitiveness, high demands, and achievement.
4. The glue that holds the shop together is the emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment. Aggressiveness and winning are common themes.

Voice (self-developed based on Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)

Check the box on the **left** of a team member's name **if you typically share** your work-related suggestions or ideas with that employee.

Leader performance (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)
He/she:

1. She/he fulfils the responsibilities specified in his/her job description.
2. She/he performs the tasks that are expected as part of the job.
3. She/he meets performance expectation.
4. She/he adequately completes responsibilities.

Reward recommendation (Allen & Rush, 1998)
Indicate the extent to which you would recommend this employee for the following rewards

1. Salary increase
2. Promotion
3. High-profile project
4. Public recognition (e.g., company award)
5. Opportunities for professional development (e.g., special training)

Leader ember Exchange (Bauer & Green, 1996)

1. I usually know where I stand with my manager.
2. I usually know how satisfied my manager is with me.

3. My manager understands my problems and needs.
4. My manager recognizes my potential well.
5. Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, my manager would be personally inclined to use his/her power to help me solve problems in my work.
6. I count on my manager to "bail me out," even at his/her expense, when I really need it.
7. My manager has enough confidence in me that he/she would defend and justify my decision if I were not present to do so.
8. I would characterize the working relationship I have with my manager as extremely effective.

APPENDIX B

Experimental Materials for Study 2

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four vignettes based on a 2 X 2 design of humble versus non-humble leadership conditions and competitive versus control work context conditions. The four vignettes are equally long in Chinese.

Leader: Humble condition

Your competent manager Yang Liu has been rated a star manager for three years. He:

- *actively seeks feedback, even if it is critical.*
- *acknowledges when others have more knowledge and skills.*
- *often compliments subordinates on their strengths.*
- *is willing to learn from others and demonstrates openness to the advice of others.*

Leader: Non-humble condition

Your competent manager Yang Liu has been rated a star manager for three years. He:

- *rarely seeks feedback and becomes angry when he receives critical comments from subordinates.*
- *always appears to know everything and never acknowledges when others have more knowledge and skills.*
- *never compliments subordinates on their strengths.*
- *seems closed to advice and is unwilling to learn from others.*

Work context: Competitive condition

You work for Company A, which has the following characteristics:

- *The company is very results-oriented and is mostly concerned about getting work done.*
- *Colleagues are very competitive and achievement-oriented.*
- *Managers have a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus.*
- *Managers are hard-driving, competitive, highly demanding, and achievement-oriented.*

- *The glue that holds the company together is the emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment. Aggressiveness and winning are common themes.*

Work context: Control condition

You work for Company A, which has the following characteristics:

- *The company is one of several companies in the building.*
- *As in most nearby companies, the commute time to work is usually one and a half hours.*
- *Working hours are 9am to 6pm. Overtime work is similar to that in nearby companies.*
- *Affordable eateries with acceptable food are located near the company.*
- *Employees have an hour for lunch.*